

Abstract (English)

David Fopp: The aesthetical, educational and political idea of being humane. Philosophical investigations in the field of “applied theatre” following Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s gestalttheoretical phenomenology

This dissertation analyses the most important forms of drama/acting-exercises in the field of “applied theatre” (acting-schools, drama education and community theatre) from the perspective of establishing democratic relations and spaces. What happens in these imaginative interactions and what is needed in their aesthetical and pedagogical framework so that a special type of playful meeting occurs leading to a “connectedness” in the relation to others and oneself?

Three phenomena (and their interdependence) are central to this project: the already mentioned capacity of being more or less in contact, connected (or alienated) to ourselves and others; the aesthetical and educational phenomenon of a creative space of trust and acceptance; and the idea of being “humane” – for example describing the atmosphere and characters of many works of the classical (childrens) literature and film: such as Lindgren or Dickens, but even of works of art such as Chaplins films. This idea is explored by comparing it to three concepts of being “human”: an anthropological, a moral and an ethical. The dissertation shows how the idea of being humane can be seen as foundational even to them and the related ideas of beauty and justice.

The aim of this study is to explore the possibility of seeing these humane interactions and spaces as an understandable and even teachable phenomenon: Is being humane a possible effect of aesthetic (acting) interactions; and does a pedagogy exist, which activates this humane dimension in us? Several “mechanisms” behind the energy of these connected interactions are detected; here presented in the section about the theoretical background. The further consequences of this idea are developed in relation to our understanding of democratic spaces in general (not only the educational spaces) – in the broader context of late-modern society with its specific economical logic which is challenged (in the tradition of critical theory) and replaced by the idea of being humane. The play-spaces of the applied theatre are described as possibilities of breaking out of this society to give a glimpse of real democratic relations, but equally as breaking into and transforming the society by describing it as a “scenery” full of actors creating or inhibiting the democratic space of integrity, opening up alternative stories or an alternative common history.

For this dissertation art has therefore an ambivalent role, represented by a critical analysis of the dance film “Billy Elliot” (by Stephen Daldry): as a place – like the places of the applied theatre – which opens up for the described forms of connected relations; but in contrast to the forms of applied theatre also as missing this very idea by just creating market-products. Both aspects are reflected in the internal structure of the artwork itself: it allows a contact to those who lost their connection ; it creates a humane space but only as an utopical one.

On the methodological level these connecting interactions are not only written about, but are also evoked in an “arts-based-research”-approach: the central acting exercises are not only analysed, but presented so that the imagination of the reader is provoked. The same happens concerning the analysis of the artworks, especially the film-analysis; instead of only discussing aesthetic or cultural theory as humanism, (post-)structuralism, feminism or marxism (which is also done), a whole dimension of our thinking and watching is being involved.

On the level of theory the “mechanisms” behind the humane interactions are related to four dimensions and their interdependence: the integrity of the bodily space (Fredrik M. Alexander); the playful “attuned” interaction itself (Daniel Stern; Keith Johnstone); the social space of trust (Bowlby/Ainsworth) and the structure of the political surroundings (Harmut Rosa). The ideal is the activation of a socially connected and embodied imagination – which is contrasted to the denial of this human capacity (as a form of indifference or neglect, especially towards children in education) and to different forms of a disconnected use of it. This special imaginative dimension is even related to the centre of all our perception and experience following the main thesis of the tradition of “Gestalt”-theory; which is presented in the form of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological reinterpretation of it.

Not only the way of interacting between us humans, but also our understanding and relation to nature and technology can be transformed by following the model of this third dimension. The underlying normative idea of the text is a result of the analysis of the mentioned tradition (including developmental psychologists as Stern, Winnicott and Bowlby): we all are from our first days as children already specialists in looking for and even organizing these humane interactions and connected relations, if we find the right socio-economical circumstances. Every other form of interaction can be shown as shortening or hurting this given space of integrity. As a result we should reorganize not only the educational institutions, but all democratic spaces (such as health care, justice and economy) with this knowledge about the mechanisms which make a connected relation to ourselves and the environment possible – which includes a fundamental change in the way to treat our own and the common resources.

Keywords: Philosophy; applied theatre; drama education; aesthetics; education; imagination; democracy; being humane; Gestalttheory; Merleau-Ponty; Keith Johnstone; Daniel Stern.